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ABSTRACT

The recent trends in economic education reflect the perennial issues regarding economics education. Trends identified include: (1) economics and citizenship education; (2) economic education in Russia and Eastern Europe; (3) the global economy; (4) content standards; and (5) use of computer technology in economic education. The Digest concludes that serious dialogue regarding the relationship among economic systems, democratic governments, and civic education bodes well for the future of economics in the core of democratic citizenship education. Contains 13 references. (EH)

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Recent Trends In Economic Education

by Lynn R. Nelson

Economics, while frequently acknowledged as a vital component of citizenship education in both the popular and educational press, has been a controversial and contested component of the school curriculum. Recent trends in economic education are manifestations of the perennial issues regarding economic knowledge in the education of citizens and how best to provide teachers with a fund of economic knowledge and materials.

Trend 1: Economics and Citizenship Education. The nature of citizenship education remains a constant topic of debate in the social studies literature. Given the economic changes accompanying the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the perennial issue of the relationship of economic understanding and disposition to the education of citizens in a democracy, it is not surprising that this topic is receiving a lot of attention (Branson 1991). Interest in economics as a core component of citizenship education has resurged.

Trend 2: Economic Education in Russia and Eastern Europe. Interrelated with the education of citizens is the issue of the role of economic education in Russia and the newly independent states. Democracy and capitalism require a degree of participatory decision making that was neither practiced in society nor taught in the schools of former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The last five years have witnessed a number of economic education programs involving exchanges between Central and Eastern Europeans and American economics educators which have promoted teaching and learning about market-based economic systems and democratic governance.

Trend 3: The Global Economy. Economic education throughout much of the 1960s and 1970s concentrated on the application of economic concepts to understanding and analyzing the economy of the United States. Beginning in the 1970s with the oil embargo, the growth of the Japanese economy, and more recently the global ecological issues and political events in Central and Eastern Europe, economic education increasingly has become concerned with international issues. Recent articles and teaching materials have focused on the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Latin American economies, as well as the Central and East European economic situation. International trade on a global scale is highlighted in recent publications of the National Council on Economic Education.

Trend 4: Content Standards. Economic education has followed the national trend of creating content standards. Economic educators at the national and state levels have developed content standards delineating the knowledge and application skills which students should possess at various grade levels. *The Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics*, developed and published by the National Council on Economic Education (NCEE), are written in the form of propositions. They include the key concepts that have traditionally served as the framework for economic education materials developed by the National Council on Economic Education. See *A Framework for Teaching Basic Economic Concepts*, which provides an explanation of key economic concepts and recommendations for sequencing them within the curriculum (Saunders and Gilliard, 1995).

Each content standard is accompanied by a rationale explaining its significance, as well as the performances of students required to demonstrate achievement of this knowledge at the 4th, 8th, and 12th grade levels. The twenty content standards embody the essential principles of economics and the essential reasoning and decision-making skills that indicate what students should be able to do with their knowledge of economics.

Trend 5: Use of Computer Technology in Economic Education. The efficiency of technology holds out the prospect of improved economic education as students gain access to almost unlimited sources of data. Teachers unsure of their economic knowledge are able to almost instantly find answers to questions. Most important, when time is scarce, teachers will have access to lesson plans without having to leaf through a number of separate sources of information.

Economic education has been modified through the Internet access that many teachers and students now enjoy. Students have instant access to data that was unimaginable five years ago. Teachers, for example, can type in http://www.3.mgmt.purdue.edu/icee/ on their World Wide Web browser and gain access to the *Indiana Council for Economic Education* (ICEE) homepage and from there more about the World Wide Web.

The Internet is not the sole source of economic education materials. *Virtual Economics*, a CD-ROM program, places the Library of Materials developed by the National Council on Economic Education at the disposal of the classroom teacher. The initial program was distributed to more than 50,000 teachers and administrators in a series of workshops during 1996. Similar to the original version, the new 2.0 program will operate on Microsoft Windows 3.1, Windows 95, Windows NT, or Macintosh II, provided the computer has a 13" color monitor, a wound cord and speakers, and a minimum of eight megabytes of RAM.

The updated *Virtual Economics* program will retain the two-fold structure of the original version: a 3-D Interactive Center for Economics and a Resource Library. New features in the updated version include advanced placement economics

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resources, the national and state content standards in economics, and materials related to The Stock Market Game. *Virtual Economics* will enable teachers to instantly access lesson plans by grade level and content. Furthermore, teachers will be able to print out a majority of these materials for classroom use. The programs provide teachers with multiple explanations for concepts they may not understand, or find difficult to teach.

Information about *Virtual Economics* or other materials developed and disseminated by the National Council on Economic Education, including *The Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics*, may be obtained at the following Internet address: http://www.economicsamerica.org/ or by writing or telephoning the NCEE at: 1140 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036; Telephone: (800) 338-1192; Fax: (212) 730-1793.

Conclusion. Knowledge of economics is an essential component of citizenship education. There are no panaceas to solve the problems contributing to ignorance of the subject: secondary teachers who all too frequently possess the minimum state requirements in economics; elementary teachers who commonly complete no undergraduate courses in economics; and a curriculum centered on history, political science, and geography. The recent trends in economic education, however, give reason for optimism. Not only are educators stressing the importance of economics for personal and business decisions, they also appear to be engaging in serious dialog regarding the relationship between economic systems, democratic governments, and civic education. This bodes well for the future of economics in the core of democratic citizenship education.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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